

Testimony of Starr Sayres, Vice President, Connecticut forest & Park Association regarding S.B. 831

My name is Starr Sayres. I live in East Haddam, CT, and am Vice President of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association, an organization that has dedicated itself to the conservation of Connecticut's forests, parks and trails for 116 years. CFPA has been bringing its environmental policy recommendations to the state Legislature every year since 1897 and takes pride in the successful adoption of many of its recommendations.

While my testimony directs itself to S.B. 831: An Act Concerning Municipal Liability for Recreational Activities, I would also like to express my support for S.B. 43: An Act Expanding the Recreational Land Use Act; S.B. 90: An Act Concerning the Recreational Land Use Act; and, H.B. 5254: An Act Expanding the Recreational Land Use Act.

One of the ways in which we develop interest in the land and encourage it in others is by experiencing our own personal connection with the outdoors. In a 2005 Assessment of Demand, the DEP Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Study (SCORP) revealed that over 93% of Connecticut households participate in land-based recreation. As the state and its 169 municipalities "are the dominant providers of outdoor recreational opportunities in Connecticut," losing accessibility to municipal recreational resources would represent a significant erosion of our quality of life.

The question has been asked, "Where will the children play?" Accessibility to recreational resources within easy reach of our neighborhoods takes on particular importance in this consideration and in consideration of the busy lives of working families trying to juggle demands and make time for outdoor activities for themselves and their children.

While sympathizing with the concerns of towns and municipalities following recent liability lawsuits, I submit that we can choose to live our lives with mistrust and fear, bullied by the actions of the few, or we can conduct ourselves with courage and generosity, embracing the spirit of a free society as we make judgments and decisions. In the case before us, it is clear to me that by extending the protection we already offer through the original Recreational Land Use Act of 1971 to municipalities we enshrine free public access to the bounteous lands we hold in common. Let us make a place for ourselves and our children to play. Let us give our children the opportunity to grow up caring for the land and bearing responsibility for it, because as children they played upon it and grew to love it. I urge adoption of S.B. 831 restoring recreational liability protection for municipalities.